

# The Problem of Peer Violence Among Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

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**Abstract:** The work was created with the desire to point out the problem of peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students. Due to their specific characteristics created under the influence of hearing impairment, deaf and hard of hearing students are exposed to a greater risk of peer violence compared to their hearing peers. The aim of the paper is to analyze the available literature from years 2002-2022 and determine whether deaf and hard-of-hearing students are exposed to peer violence and what its nature is. The following search engines were used to search the literature: Ebscohost, ScienceDirect., KoBSON, Google Scholar. The results of the literature review show that deaf and hard of hearing students are exposed to peer violence and that the frequency of peer violence is higher among deaf and hard of hearing students compared to their hearing peers. Deaf and hard of hearing students are more often exposed to traditional forms of violence than to cyberbullying. Research also shows that the frequency of peer violence is higher in special than in regular schools. As due to the nature of their communication and social functioning, deaf and hard of hearing students are actually not always able to recognize and report peer violence, the question arises of the actual level of frequency of peer violence among these students. The problem of peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students indicates the need to develop programs for the prevention and stopping peer violence that will be adapted to deaf and hard of hearing students.

**Keywords:** peer violence, cyberbullying, deaf and hard of hearing students, programs to prevent peer violence.

## Introduction

Peer violence implies a specific form of continuous intergenerational violence that arises from a certain relationship between peers in primary and secondary school, with the aim of causing harm to the victim (most often psychological), but primarily to portray the bully as dominant in the group (Miladinović and Petričević, 2013). The most common types of peer violence are physical, verbal and relational violence. Physical violence represents the infliction of any form of physical damage to the victim and their property, which is mainly manifested by hitting, slapping, breaking personal belongings. Verbal violence is expressed by insulting, humiliating, calling someone derogatory names, etc. Relational violence, or alternative or relational aggression, is an insidious type of violence that includes ignoring, social isolation or avoidance of an individual. Verbal and relational violence are also classified as psychological violence. Sexual violence among peers is also mentioned in the literature, which is characterized by different behaviors, from sexual comments to unwanted physical contact with the victim (Coloroso, 2004).

With the constant use of the Internet and the emerge of social networks, electronic peer violence (digital violence, cyberbullying, electronic violence) begins to develop. Cyberbullying represents any malicious and repeated use of information and communication technologies to harm a person who cannot easily defend themselves (Tokunaga, 2010). The main elements of this form of violence are the characteristics of traditional violence with a description or enumeration of the electronic device through which electronic violence occurs (Vandebosch and Van Cleemput, 2009). The activities that cyberbullying include are harassment, stalking, insulting, enco group hatred, impersonation, attacks on privacy, unauthorized communication, deception, exclusion, cyber stalking (Bilić, Bulan Flander and Hrpka, 2012; Hoover and Stenhjem, 2003). Recently, a new form of cyberbullying has been especially highlighted, the video recording of attacks. This form of violence implies that the perpetrator intentionally, in any way,

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abuses the victim and all the time records the event in order to send it or publish it publicly, all with the purpose of ridiculing the victim (Bilić, 2014).

Traditionally, peer violence, i.e. physical, verbal and social violence correlates highly with cyberbullying, therefore it is very difficult to separate them and observe them in isolation, considering that in most cases they follow each other (Yoon and Tairiol, 2009). Despite this correlation and the dominance of modern information technologies, which open up more space for encouraging peer and electronic violence, traditional peer violence still has a higher frequency than electronic violence (Hammad and Awed, 2020). The victim of peer violence is most often a person whose physical and social characteristics differ from the majority (Hoover and Stenhjem, 2003; Platero, Méndez and Ceto, 2007; O'Moore, 2010; Pinquart, 2017).

The specifics of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, which arose in conditions of deafness, make these students different from their hearing peers, and these specifics are reflected in their physical characteristics, speech-language expression and social functioning. Physical characteristics that distinguish deaf and hard of hearing students are visible, hearing aids. Speech and language expression of hard-of-hearing students with severe and very severe hearing impairment is characterized by large distortions in articulation, nasal tone of voice, reduced fluency, which contributes to making it difficult for the environment to understand them in communication. Deaf students, due to a complete loss of hearing, most often adopt and use dactylography and sign language. Hard of hearing students most often attend regular schools, and deaf students attend special schools. Special schools are adapted to the communication possibilities and abilities of deaf students, and in such conditions they acquire knowledge, reading and writing skills and develop language for further social functioning. The social functioning of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, which results from their speech and language characteristics, implies a constant focus on the face of the interlocutor in order to read speech from the mouth, expressed facial expressions, increased gesticulation (Đoković, 2004; Jolić and Isaković, 2008; Isaković and Kovačević, 2015; Kovačević and Isaković, 2019). In addition, the sphere of social functioning of deaf and hard of hearing students is threatened, they are often isolated, socially and emotionally unadjusted and immature. They have difficulty developing empathy, have difficulties with self-control and are prone to impulsive behavior (Dimoski, 2011). The mentioned specifics of deaf and hard of hearing students attract peer violence and the chances of deaf and hard of hearing students experiencing peer violence increase.

## Methodology

In the light of our basic interest, which is: Is peer violence present and recognized among deaf and hard of hearing students? The main criterion for the selection of papers was that those papers include the problem of peer violence among students with hearing impairment. The aim of the paper is to analyze the available literature in the period from 2002 to 2022 to determine the extent to which deaf and hard of hearing students are exposed to peer violence, as well as to describe its nature. The following search engines were used for the literature search: Ebscohost, ScienceDirect, Wiley Inter Science and SpringerLink, KoBSON, Google Scholar. Papers were searched based on the following keywords: peer violence, deaf and hard of hearing students as victims of peer violence, peer violence among students with disabilities, peer violence among students with sensory impairments, prevention of peer violence. This paper includes over 60 studies, with ten state-of-the-art studies done in the last five years, which were analyzed in detail in accordance with the research questions. Other criteria for the selection of papers were based on research questions related to the frequency and forms of peer violence, the influence of gender, degree of hearing impairment, type of school and school age on peer violence, consequences and prevention of peer violence. Peer violence among students is spreading more and more, and it is especially difficult to detect it among deaf and hard of hearing students, both because of the sensitivity of this topic and because of the specificity of the functioning of these students who are born in conditions of hearing impairment. The consequences of peer violence affect the overall development of students, therefore it is necessary to focus more attention on the occurrence of peer violence within this population of students. In accordance with the above, this paper is of great importance because it directly points to the problem and specifically deals with the nature of peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students.

### Peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students

People with disabilities are more at risk of becoming victims of peer violence compared to people from the typical population (Van Cleane and Davis, 2006; Young, Ne'eman and Gelser 2012; Schroeder et al., 2014; Fink et al., 2015; Huffman, 2015; Maiano et al., 2016 ) especially students with physical

impairments, hearing impairment and visual impairment (Rose, Monda-Amaya and Espelage 2011; Swearer et al., 2012). Peer violence among deaf and hard-of-hearing students represents a problem that is still not sufficiently researched and which, due to its sensitive nature, requires special attention (Weiner, Day and Galvan (2013)).

Between 17-32.5 % of deaf and hard of hearing students experience peer violence (Kvam and Loeb, 2010; Blake et al., 2012; Hadjikakou and Panayiotis, 2012). Compared to their hearing peers, deaf and hard of hearing students are more exposed to peer violence (Pinquart and Pfeiffer, 2015). It has been shown that deaf and hard of hearing students who have the support of their peers, the support of their parents and better grades are less exposed to peer violence.

Weiner, Day and Galvan (2013) indicate that deaf and hard-of-hearing students have experienced peer violence three times more than their hearing peers, as well as that they are more often exposed to traditional forms of violence than to cyberbullying. The opposite is true for their hearing peers, they are more often exposed to cyberbullying than traditional peer violence. The authors looked at these results with the fact that deaf and hard of hearing students are not in such a good socio-economic situation, i.e. that there are only a small number of them who own smart phones, that they do not fully understand how communication via the Internet works, as well as what the risks are when using the Internet and information technologies (Bauman and Pero, 2010). However, Aslan (2016) came to conflicting results indicating that deaf and hard of hearing students are more often victims of cyberbullying. The forms of peer violence that are most present in deaf and hard of hearing students are verbal violence, alternative or relational aggression and physical violence (Kouwenberg et al., 2012; Pinquart and Pfeiffer, 2015; Lund and Ross, 2016). Deaf and hard of hearing students are different because they wear hearing aids, use sign language, or have specific spoken language expression (Cheng, Chou and Lin, 2019). The very nature of hearing impairment, the poor and specific communication skills that develop in this condition lead to the fact that the deaf and hard of hearing primarily do not hear, and then do not recognize and understand the elements of peer violence that are directed towards them. It is considered that the victims of peer violence are those deaf and hard of hearing students who do not have sufficiently developed and adequate social skills, and due to inconsistencies in communication, they are deprived of certain social information that helps them understand the situation in which they found themselves and to deal with it (Tresh, 2004; Felinger et al., 2009; Bauman and Pero, 2010; Theunissen et al., 2014). Inadequate social skills further lead to social immaturity, which represents a great risk for committing various forms of peer violence against deaf and hard of hearing students (Hadjikakou and Panayiotis, 2012). McCrone (2004) believes that one of the most common reasons for peer violence and mistreatment of the deaf and hard of hearing lies in the fact that they are perceived by society as not as good or valuable as others who do not have hearing problems. Then it is understandable why there are situations in which some individuals tend to find the causes of unpleasant events within the framework of peer violence in their own limitations and shortcomings, such as deafness, and not in external factors. In that case, the victims blame themselves and believe that they are responsible for the fact that peer violence happened and that their damage, helplessness, limitations are the triggers for it (Bauman and Pero, 2010).

Students who have some kind of hearing impairment are often prone to marginalization and peer violence. Studies have shown that students with hearing aids are more susceptible to a higher degree of peer violence compared to their hearing peers. Traditional peer violence is more frequent, i.e. has a higher frequency compared to cyberbullying (Broekhof et al., 2018; Warner – Czyn et al., 2018; Feijoo et al., 2021). This has also been found with deaf students in Sweden, as well as with hard of hearing students in Taiwan (Brunnberg, Bostrom and Berlund, 2018; Cheng, Chou and Lin, 2019). On the other hand, in a Brazilian study, no statistically significant difference was found between hearing and deaf and hard of hearing adolescents in terms of peer violence, but it was found that the frequency of peer violence is increasing (Ernsen, 2016).

A review of the available literature shows that deaf and hard of hearing students are not only victims but also perpetrators of peer violence (Hadjikakou and Panayiotis, 2012). The percentage of perpetrators of peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students is close to the percentage of victims (Lund and Ross, 2016). When groups of deaf and hard-of-hearing perpetrators are compared with groups of their hearing peers, no statistically significant difference is obtained in terms of peer violence (Pinquart and Pfeiffer, 2015). Like the previous group of authors, Aslan (2016) also points out that deaf and hard-of-hearing students are both perpetrators and victims of peer violence, that is, the percentage of students from both groups is approximately equal. According to the results of the latest research by Hammad and Awed (2020), it was found that the percentage of victims and perpetrators of peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students is almost equal, which is in accordance with the results of the previously mentioned research.

### **Peer violence in relation to gender, degree of hearing impairment, type of school, school age and self-esteem of deaf and hard of hearing students**

Research often raises the question of whether there is a gender difference in the frequency of peer violence. Are male or female students more susceptible to peer violence? Rather conflicting results are obtained. There is a larger number of studies that have shown that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students in terms of peer violence (Calvete et al., 2010; Dembo et al., 2019; Feijoo et al., 2021). This number is followed by research that indicates that male respondents are more often victims of both traditional peer and cyberbullying (Huang and Chou, 2010; Twardowska - Staszek, Zych and Ortega - Ruiz, 2018; Hammad and Awed, 2020). However, in addition to these studies, there are also those whose results showed that female respondents are more exposed to peer violence (Cenat et al., 2014).

Degree of hearing impairment, communication model and type of hearing aid did not prove to be factors within which there are differences in peer violence, i.e. there are no statistically significant differences between groups within these variables in terms of frequency and severity of peer violence (Kouwenberg et al., 2012).

Research that dealt with differences in school age showed that peer violence is most common among students of older elementary school age (from fifth to eighth grade), and it continues in the middle school period with a tendency to decrease (Bilić, Buljan-Flander and Hrpka, 2012). According to parents' reports, we come across information that the percentage of peer violence in elementary schools, in grades one to four, is about 22%, in grades five to eight about 29%, and in high schools about 22.5%. It is assumed that this percentage is even higher, but it is not recorded because not all students report to their parents that they were victims of peer violence (Blake et al., 2012). But it should also be mentioned that there are different findings, where the decline of peer violence is already visible in the older grades of primary school (Olweus, 1998) or the increase during the middle school period (Hemphill, Tollit and Kotevski, 2012). This is supported by research that has shown that peer violence is more pronounced in adolescence, in high school students (Blake et al., 2012; Weiner Day and Galvan, 2013). Adolescents with hearing aids are more susceptible to a higher degree of peer violence compared to their hearing peers (Broekhof et al., 2018; Warner – Czyz et al., 2018; Feijoo et al., 2021). Despite the fact that deaf and hard of hearing students have more pleasant social experiences in special schools, research shows that peer violence occurs more often in special schools than in mainstream schools (Klewin, Stinson and Colarossi, 2002; Dixon, 2006; Arulogun et al., 2012; Kouwenberg et al., 2012; Marschark et al., 2012; Fumes and Oliveira, 2013; Weiner, Day and Galvan, 2013; Theunissen et al., 2014). In schools for the deaf, about 32.5% of students reported being victims of violence at least 2 to 3 times a month (Weiner, Day and Galvan, 2013). The most common types of violence among deaf and hard of hearing students that occur in special schools are verbal and physical violence (Arulogun et al., 2012). An explanation for these results can be found in the fact that deaf and hard of hearing students in special schools have similar speech and language characteristics and communication models and communicate better and recognize more easily if they have been victims of peer violence. As a prerequisite for traditional peer violence and cyberbullying, self-esteem is also starting to be investigated (Patchin and Hinduja, 2010). Research results most often show that victims of cyberbullying have a low level of self-esteem and that low self-esteem is a factor that contributes to students being exposed to a greater risk of any form of peer violence (Aslan, 2011; Sesar, Šimić and Barišić, 2011; Brito and Oliveira, 2013; Hesapcioglu, Yesilova Meraler and Ercan, 2018; Hammad and Awed, 2020). On the other hand, research has shown that even in the group of perpetrators of peer violence, respondents had low self-esteem, which means that low self-esteem is certainly a risk factor when it comes to peer violence, regardless of whether it is about committing or experiencing it (Kowalski and Limber, 2013; Dadic, 2014; Hammad and Awed, 2020).

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who have problems accepting their impairment and functioning within it, become more vulnerable over time, their level of self-esteem decreases and they do not have enough emotional self-control, which contributes to them becoming easy targets for both perpetrators of traditional peer violence and perpetrators of cyberbullying (Hadjikakou and Panayiotis, 2012).

Exposure to peer violence affects the reduction of the quality of life of students, which manifests itself later in life. Among students who were victims of peer violence, weak social skills are impaired, problems with mental health, tendency to depression and anxiety disorders, and suicide occur. These students have impaired self-esteem and problems with alcoholism and smoking (Ybarra and Mitchell 2004; Hoglund, 2007; Kowalski and Limber, 2013; Brunstein, Sourander and Gould, 2010; Swearer et al., 2012; Fedwa and Ahn, 2011; Sessa and Sutherland, 2013; McVie, 2014; Takizawa, Maughan and Arseneault, 2014).



Research shows that there is a connection between school success and experiencing peer violence. Victims of bullying, whether at school or online, were more likely to have difficulties at school such as absenteeism, poor concentration, learning problems, poorer grades, and generally showed lower academic performance compared to non-bullied students (Beran and Li, 2007; Juvonen and Gross, 2008; Kowalski and Limber, 2013; Yang, Ne'eman and Gelser, 2013).

### **Anti-bullying programs, the prevention of peer violence and recommendations for future research**

A large number of victims of peer violence are afraid to report the violence because they think that it will make the situation worse, that no one will react and take any measures or that their technical devices for communication (mobile phones, computers, tablets...) will be taken away from them (Bauman and Pero, 2010). The authors point out that when students are encouraged to anonymously report some form of peer violence they have suffered, they begin to feel liberated and better, which further motivates them to talk more about this topic (Jaffe et al., 2015). Peer violence is most often reported by students to their parents, and then to friends and teachers (Feijoo et al., 2021). Violence is most effectively stopped when it is reported to adults, who intervene as soon as possible to positively affect the victim's overall condition (Bjereld, Daneback and Mishna, 2021). Parents' reactions to peer violence are different, some parents provide children with emotional support and strategies that can help them deal with peer violence, others urge school counselors and teachers, some talk to the perpetrators of peer violence and their parents, all with the goal to protect their child (Harcourt, Green and Bowden, 2015). On the other hand, there are those parents who consider peer violence a normal experience in their child's development and do not take any steps (Sawyer et al., 2011).

One of the strategies for combating peer violence is the implementation of so-called anti-bullying programs, that is, programs for the prevention of peer violence. The programs that have been implemented so far have yielded positive results in reducing verbal violence by 20%, reducing physical violence by 27% and the percentage of social exclusion of individuals decreased by 28% (Limber, Olweus and Luxenberg, 2013).

Anti-bullying are not only used to reduce the frequency of peer violence, but also to work on its prevention. Such programs must be constantly improved because the dynamics of relationships between young people in today's society often change. Through programs for the prevention of peer violence, it is necessary to insist on spreading the story about peer violence and point out the problems and consequences it causes. The essence of these programs is to act on relationships among peers in the direction that will lead to supportive, tolerant, cooperative and friendly relationships (Hadzeldau Foundation, 2014). It is necessary to promote social skills such as empathy and cooperative action, as opposed to insisting on the development of a competitive spirit. By developing the aforementioned social skills, students would understand that it is necessary to defend and protect each other and that then the chances of inciting peer violence are minimal (Jenkins et al., 2016). In the processes of creating and implementing programs to prevent peer violence, in addition to appropriate experts, students, their parents, school employees and members of the community where students live and grow up must also be involved (Hadzeldau Foundation, 2014). With the help of the program for the prevention of peer violence, a safe environment is created in which deaf and hard of hearing students and their hearing peers can develop connections and social skills with the lowest possible risk of experiencing and committing peer violence.

Programs for the prevention of peer violence must be adapted to deaf and hard-of-hearing students so that they can understand them and gain the best possible insight into what peer violence entails. This is extremely important because only then will they be able to actually recognize and report peer violence (Raskauskas and Modell, 2011). When it comes to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, prevention contributes to information and familiarization with the phenomenon of deafness, Deaf culture, speech-language specifics of deaf and hard-of-hearing, their communication needs, sign language (Dixon, 2006).

One of the great advantages that can be derived from programs of this nature is that their existence and implementation can lead to a more substantial and essential implementation of social inclusion. As these programs promote the creation and maintenance of tolerant, cooperative, supportive and friendly relationships, opportunities are opened for getting to know the personal values of deaf and hard of hearing students, their acceptance and inclusion in society without looking back on their limitations and shortcomings.

### Recommendations for future research

Research has shown that the problem of peer violence is present in the population of deaf and hard of hearing students and that these students are exposed to a greater risk of peer violence (Broekhof et al., 2018; Brunnenberg, Bostrom and Berlund, 2018; Warner - Czyz et al., 2018; Cheng, Chou and Lin, 2019; Feijoo et al., 2021; Hammad and Awed, 2020). Such findings point to the need to focus more attention on elucidating the problem and examining the factors of peer violence in more detail within the population of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Given that no domestic research papers describing the nature of peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students have been found, we believe that it is necessary to carry out research on this topic in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Since it is about the population of deaf and hard of hearing students, in future research, it should be taken into account whether models of communication and expression that suit these students are used, which contributes to the validity of the results.

### Conclusion

Looking at the available literature, we conclude that peer violence is a frequent phenomenon among deaf and hard of hearing students, but at the same time insufficiently researched in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Due to the nature of their communication and social functioning, deaf and hard of hearing students are actually not always able to recognize and report peer violence, which makes it even more difficult to determine the level of frequency of peer violence among these students. Research also shows that the frequency of peer violence is higher in special schools than in regular schools. Such results are explained by the fact that in special schools, the communication models among students are similar, they communicate better and easier, so it is therefore easier for them to recognize peer violence in such an environment. We are of the opinion that it is necessary to create and develop programs for the prevention of peer violence, adapted to deaf and hard of hearing students, which will be part of the development and strengthening of social inclusion. The focus should be on strengthening peer relationships and creating a safe social environment. In addition to preventing peer violence, the advantage of these programs is a better introduction and understanding of the diversity of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This approach reduces both the chances and the risk of creating peer violence among deaf and hard of hearing students.

### Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization, J.B.K. and M.B.K.; methodology, J.B.K.; software, M.B.K.; formal analysis, M.B.K. and J.B.K.; writing—original draft preparation, M.B.K. and J.B.K.; writing—review and editing, J.B.K. and M.B.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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